*MERRIAM REPORT (1928)*

*Health.* The health of the Indians as compared with that of the general population is bad. Although accurate mortality and morbidity statistics are commonly lacking, the existing evidence warrants the statement that both the general death rate and the infant mortality rate are high. Tuberculosis is extremely prevalent. Trachoma, a communicable disease which produces blindness, is a major problem because of its great prevalence and the danger of its spreading among both the Indians and the whites.

*Living Conditions.* The prevailing living conditions among the great majority of the Indians are conducive to the development and spread of disease. With comparatively few exceptions, the diet of the Indians is bad. It is generally insufficient in quantity, lacking in variety, and poorly prepared. The two great preventive elements in diet, milk, and fruits and green vegetables, are notably absent. Most tribes use fruits and vegetables in season, but even then the supply is ordinarily insufficient. The use of milk is rare, and it is generally not available even for infants. Babies, when weaned, are ordinarily put on substantially the same diet as older children and adults, a diet consisting mainly of meats and starches.

The housing conditions are likewise conducive to bad health. Both in the primitive dwellings and in the majority of more or less permanent homes which in some cases have replaced them, there is great overcrowding, so that all members of the family are exposed to any disease that develops, and it is virtually impossible in any way even partially to isolate a person suffering from a communicable disease. In certain jurisdictions, notably the Osage and the Kiowa, the government has stimulated the building of modern homes, bungalows, or even more pretentious dwellings, but most of the permanent houses that have replaced primitive dwellings are small shacks with few rooms and with inadequate provision for ventilation. Education in housekeeping and sanitation has not proceeded far enough so that the Indians living in these more or less permanent shacks practice ventilation and domestic cleanliness. From the standpoint of health, it is probably true that the temporary, primitive dwellings that were not fairly air-tight and were frequently abandoned were more sanitary than the permanent homes that have replaced them. The furnishing of the primitive dwellings and of the shacks is limited. Although many of them still have very primitive arrangements for cooking and heating, the use of modern cook stoves and utensils is far more general than the use of beds, and the use of beds in turn is far more common than the use of any kind of easily washable bed covering.

Sanitary facilities are generally lacking. Except among the relatively few well-to-do Indians, the houses seldom have aprivate water supply or any toilet facilities whatever. Even privies are exceptional. Water is ordinarily carried considerable distances from natural springs or streams, or occasionally from wells. In many sections the supply is inadequate, although in some jurisdictions, notably in the desert country of the Southwest, the government has materially improved the situation, an activity that is appreciated by the Indians.

*Economic Conditions.* The income of the typical Indian family is low and the earned income extremely low. From the standpoint of the white man, the typical Indian is not industrious, nor is he an effective worker when he does work. Much of his activity is expended in lines which produce a relatively small return either in goods or money. He generally ekes out an existence through unearned income from leases of his land, the sale of land, per capita payments from tribal funds, or in exceptional cases through rations given him by the government. The number of Indians who are supporting themselves through their own efforts, according to what a white man would regard as the minimum standard of health and decency, is extremely small. What little they secure from their own efforts or from other sources is rarely effectively used.

The main occupations of the men are some outdoor work, mostly of an agricultural nature, but the number of real farmers is comparatively small. A considerable proportion engage more or less casually in unskilled labor. By many Indians several different kinds of activity are followed spasmodically: a little agriculture, a little fishing, hunting, trapping, wood cutting, or gathering of native products, occasional labor and hauling, and a great deal of just idling. Very seldom do the Indians work about their homes as the typical white man does. Although the permanent structures inwhich they live after giving up primitive dwellings are simple and such as they might easily build and develop for themselves, little evidence of such activity was seen. Even where more advanced Indians occupied structures similar to those occupied by neighboring whites, it was almost always possible to tell the Indian homes from the white by the fact that the white man did much more than the Indian in keeping his house in condition.

In justice to the Indians, it should be said that many of them are living on lands from which a trained and experienced white man could scarcely wrest a reasonable living. In some instances the land originally set apart for the Indians was of little value for agricultural operations other than grazing. In other instances part of the land was excellent but the Indians did not appreciate its value. Often when individual allotments were made, they chose for themselves the poorer parts, because those parts were near a domestic water supply or a source of firewood, or because they furnished some native product important to the Indians in their primitive life. Frequently the better sections of the land originally set apart for the Indians have fallen into the hands of the whites, and the Indians have retreated to the poorer lands remote from markets.

In many places crops can be raised only by the practice of irrigation. Many Indians in the Southwest are successful in a small way with their own primitive systems of irrigation. When modern, highly developed irrigation systems have been supplied by governmental activities, the Indians have rarely been ready to make effective use of the land and water. If the modern irrigation enterprise has been successful from an economic standpoint, the tendency has been for whites to gain possession of the land either by purchase or by leases. If the enterprise has not been economically a success, the Indians generally retain possession of the land, but they do not know how to use it effectively and get much less out of it than a white man would.

The remoteness of their homes often prevents them from easily securing opportunities for wage earning, nor do they have many contacts with persons dwelling in urban communities where they might find employment. Even the boys and girls graduating from government schools have comparatively little vocational guidance or aid in finding profitable employment.

When all these factors are taken into consideration, it is not surprising to find low incomes: low standards of living, and poor health.

*Suffering and Discontent.* Some people assert that the Indians prefer to live as they do; that they are happier in their idleness and irresponsibility. The question may be raised whether these persons do not mistake for happiness and content an almost oriental fatalism and resignation. The survey staff found altogether too much evidence of real suffering and discontent to subscribe to the belief that the Indians are reasonably satisfied with their condition. The amount of serious illness and poverty is too great to permit of real contentment. The Indian is like the white man in his affection for his children, and he feels keenly the sickness and the loss of his offspring.

*The Causes of Poverty.* The economic basis of the primitive culture of the Indians has been largely destroyed by the encroachment of white civilization. The Indians can no longer make a living as they did in the past by hunting, fishing, gathering wild products, and the extremely limited practice of primitive agriculture. The social system that evolved from their past economic life is ill-suited to the conditions that now confront them, notably in the matter of the division of labor between the men and the women. They are by no means yet adjusted to the new economic and social conditions that confront them.

Several past policies adopted by the government in dealing with the Indians have been of a type which, if long continued, would tend to pauperize any race. Most notable was the practice of issuing rations to able-bodied Indians. Having moved the Indians from their ancestral lands to restricted reservations as a war measure, the government undertook to feed them and to perform certain services for them which a normal people do for themselves. The Indians at the outset had to accept this aid as a matter of necessity, but promptly they came to regard it as a matter of right, as indeed it was at the time and under the conditions of the inauguration of the ration system. They felt, and many of them still feel, that the government owes them a living, having taken their lands from them, and that they are under no obligation to support themselves. They have thus inevitably developed a pauper point of view.

When the government adopted the policy of individual ownership of the land on the reservations, the expectation was that the Indians wouldbecome farmers. Part of the plan was to instruct and aid them in agriculture, but this vital part was not pressed with vigor and intelligence. It almost seems as if the government assumed that some magic inindividual ownership of property would in itself prove an educational civilizing factor, but unfortunately this policy has for the most part operated in the opposite direction. Individual ownership has in many instances permitted Indians to sell their allotments and to live for a time on the unearned income resulting from the sale. Individual ownership brought promptly all the details of inheritance, and frequently the sale of the property of the deceased Indians to whites so that the estate could be divided among the heirs. To the heirs the sale brought further unearned income, thereby lessening the necessity for self support. Many Indians were not ready to make effective use of their individual allotments. Some of the allotments were of such a character that they could not be effectively used by anyone in small units. The solution was to permit the Indians through the government to lease their lands to the whites. In some instances government officers encouraged leasing, as the whites were anxious for the use of the land and it was far easier to administer property leased to whites than to educate and stimulate Indians to use their own property. The lease money, though generally small in amount, gave the Indians further unearned income to permit the continuance of a life of idleness.

Surplus land remaining after allotments were made was often sold and the proceeds placed in a tribal fund. Natural resources, such as timber and oil, were sold and the money paid either into tribal funds or to individual Indians if the land had been allotted. From time to time per capita payments were made to the individual Indians from tribal funds. These policies all added to the unearned income of the Indian and postponed the day when it would be necessary for him to go to work to support himself.

Since the Indians were ignorant of money and its use, had little or no sense of values, and fell an easy victim to any white man who wanted to take away their property, the government, through its Indian Service employees, often took the easiest course of managing all the Indians' property for them. The government kept the Indians' money for them at the agency. When the Indians wanted something they would go to the government agent, as a child would go to his parents, and ask for it. The government agent would make all the decisions, and in many instances would either buy the thing requested or give the Indians a store order for it. Although money was sometimes given the Indians, the general belief was that the Indians could not be trusted to spend the money for the purpose agreed upon with the agent, and therefore they must not be given opportunity to misapply it. At some agencies this practice still exists, although it gives the Indians no education in the use of money, is irritating to them, and tends to decrease responsibility and increase the pauper attitude.

The typical Indian, however, has not yet advanced to the point where he has the knowledge of money and values, and of business methods that will permit him to control his own property without aid, advice, and some restrictions; nor is he ready to work consistently and regularly at more or less routine labor.

**The Work of the Government in Behalf of the Indians.** The work of the government directed toward the education and advancement of the Indian himself, as distinguished from the control and conservation of his property, is largely ineffective. The chief explanation of the deficiency in this work lies in the fact that the government has not appropriated enough funds to permit the Indian Service to employ an adequate personnel properly qualified for the task before it.

*Absence of Well-Considered, Broad Educational Program.* The outstanding evidence of the lack of an adequate, well-trained personnel is the absence of any well considered, broad educational program for the Service as a whole. Here the word education is used in its widest sense and includes not only school training for children but also activities for the training of adults to aid them in adjusting themselves to the dominant social and economic life which confronts them. It embraces education in economic production and in living standards necessary for the maintenance of health and decency.

*Work for the Promotion of Health.* The inadequacy of appropriations has prevented the development of an adequate system of public health administration and medical relief work for the Indians. The number of doctors, nurses, and dentists is insufficient. Because of small appropriations the salaries for the personnel in health work are materially below those paid by the government in its other activities concerned with public health and medical relief, specifically the Public Health Service, the Army, the Navy, and the Veterans' Bureau, as well as below those paid by private organizations for similar services. Since its salaries are sub-standard, the Indian Service has not been able to set reasonably high entrance qualifications and to adhere to them. In the case of doctors, the standards set for entrance have been too low. In the case of public health nurses the standards have been reasonable, but it has not been possible to secure at the salary offered a sufficient number of applicants, so that many people have to be employed temporarily who do not possess the required qualifications. Often untrained, inexperienced field matrons are attempting to perform duties which would be fairly difficult for a well-trained, experienced public health nurse. For general nursing positions, it has often been necessary to substitute for properly trained nurses, practical nurses, some of whom possess few qualifications for the work.

The hospitals, sanatoria, and sanatorium schools maintained by the Service, despite a few exceptions, must be generally characterized as lacking in personnel, equipment, management, and design. The statement is sometimes made that, since the Indians live according to a low scale, it is not necessary for the government to furnish hospital facilities for them which are comparable with those supplied for poor white people in a progressive community. The survey staff regards this basis of judging facilities as unsound. The question is whether the hospitals and sanatoria are efficient institutions for the care and treatment of patients, and this question must generally be answered in the negative.

Although the present administration has made a praiseworthy forward step in the reorganization of the Indian medical service and has secured from the Public Health Service a well-qualified director for the chief position, it is hampered at every turn by the limitations of its present staff and equipment and by lack of funds for development. Under the present administration, too, a real beginning has been made in public health nursing. Despite these recent promising developments, it is still true that the Indian Service is markedly deficient in the field of public health and preventive medicine. The preventive work in combating the two important diseases of tuberculosis and trachoma can only be characterized as weak. The same word must be applied to the efforts toward preventing infant mortality and the diseases of children. Here and there some effective work is done in maternity cases, just about enough to demonstrate that competent, tactful physicians can induce a very considerable number of Indian women to have professional care in childbirth and to advance beyond the crude, unsanitary, and at times, even brutal primitive practices.

Another striking need is for the development of the public health clinic, an agency extremely effective in locating cases of tuberculosis and other communicable diseases in their incipiency and thus permitting of the early treatment of the sufferer when there is still chance to help him, and also making it possible to exercise some control over contagion. The number of public health clinics in the Indian Service is small, and the two or three deserving the name are of recent origin and are not adequately equipped.

Vital statistics have been called the handmaid of preventive medicine. They are indispensable for the efficient planning, development, and operation of a sound program for conservation of public health. The Indian Service has not yet been successful in overcoming the great difficulties inherent in securing vital statistics for the Indians and, moreover, its physicians in general have tended to neglect the important work of keeping case histories and other records basic to a public health program. The result is that the directing personnel of the Indian Service and the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of the Budget, and Congress and its committees lack the information essential for planning, development, and control. Under such circumstances it is inevitable that some of the money actually appropriated and expended will be wasted, if it is not almost equally inevitable that appropriations will not be proportional to needs.

Because of these numerous defects in the medical service, it is not surprising to find that serious errors have been made in the treatment of Indians suffering from trachoma. Practically entirely ignoring the view held by many students of the disease that a close relationship exists between trachoma and dietary deficiencies, the Service for some years pinned its faith on a serious, radical operation for cure without carefully watching results and checking the degree of success achieved. The Service has now recognized the marked limitations of this radical procedure and has stopped its wholesale use. Serious errors of this nature are likely to occur in a service which is so seriously understaffed that following up cases and checking results are neglected. This serious operation was unquestionably performed on many Indians who did not need it, and, because of the difficulties in diagnosis of trachoma, upon some Indians who did not even have the disease.

*Formal Education of Indian Children.* For several years the general policy of the Indian Service has been directed away from the boarding school for Indian children and toward the public schools and Indian day schools. More Indian children are now in public schools maintained by the state or local governments than in special Indian schools maintained by the nation. It is, however, still the fact that the boarding school, either reservation or non-reservation, is the dominant characteristic of the school system maintained by the national government for its Indian wards.

The survey staff finds itself obliged to say frankly and unequivocally that the provisions for the care of the Indian children in boarding schools are grossly inadequate.

The outstanding deficiency is in the diet furnished the Indian children, many of whom are below normal health. The diet is deficient in quantity, quality, and variety. The effort has been made to feed the children on a per capita of eleven cents a day, plus what can be produced on the school farm, including the dairy. At a few, very few, schools, the farm and the dairy are sufficiently productive to be a highly important factor in raising the standard of the diet, but even at the best schools these sources do not fully meet the requirements for the health and development of the children. At the worst schools, the situation is serious in the extreme. The major diseases of the Indians are tuberculosis and trachoma. Tuberculosis unquestionably can best be combated by a preventive, curative diet and proper living conditions, and a considerable amount of evidence suggests that the same may prove true of trachoma. The great protective foods are milk and fruit and vegetables, particularly fresh green vegetables. The diet of the Indian children in boarding schools is generally notably lacking in these preventive foods. Although the Indian Service has established a quart of milk a day per pupil as the standard, it has been able to achieve this standard in very few schools. At the special school for children suffering from trachoma, now in operation at Fort Defiance, Arizona, milk is not part of the normal diet. The little produced is mainly consumed in the hospital where children acutely ill are sent. It may be seriously questioned whether the Indian Service could do very much better than it does without more adequate appropriations.

Next to dietary deficiencies comes overcrowding in dormitories. The boarding schools are crowded materially beyond their capacities. A device frequently resorted to in an effort to increase dormitory capacity without great expense is the addition of large sleeping porches. They are in themselves reasonably satisfactory, but they shut off light and air from the inside rooms, which are still filled with beds beyond their capacity. The toilet facilities have in many cases not been increased proportionately to the increase in pupils, and they are fairly frequently not properly maintained or conveniently located. The supply of soap and towels has been inadequate.

The medical service rendered the boarding school children is not up to a reasonable standard. Physical examinations are often superficial and enough provision is not made for the correction of remediable defects.

The boarding schools are frankly supported in part by the labor of the students. Those above the fourth grade ordinarily work for half a day and go to school for half a day. A distinction in theory is drawn between industrial work undertaken primarily for the education of the child and production work done primarily for the support of the institution. However, teachers of industrial work undertaken ostensibly for education say that much of it is as a matter of fact production work for the maintenance of the school. The question may very properly be raised as to whether much of the work of Indian children in boarding schools would not be prohibited in many states by the child labor laws, notably the work in the machine laundries. At several schools the laundry equipment is antiquated and not properly safeguarded. To operate on a half-work, half-study plan makes the day very long, and the child has almost no free time and little opportunity for recreation. Not enough consideration has been given the question of whether the health of the Indian children warrants the nation in supporting the Indian boarding schools in part through the labor of these children.

The medical attention given Indian children in the day schools maintained by the government is also below a reasonable standard.

In securing teachers for the government schools and in recruiting other employees for the boarding schools the Indian Service is handicapped by low salaries and must accordingly adopt low standards for entrance. Although some of the non-reservation schools purport to be high schools, the qualifications of their teaching force do not entitle them to free and unrestricted recognition as accredited high schools. At best, they have been able to secure limited recognition from local universities. The teaching taken as a whole is not up to the standards set by reasonably progressive white communities.

Some years ago, in an effort to raise standards, the Indian Service adopted a uniform curriculum for all Indian schools. Modern experience has demonstrated that the effective device for raising standards is not curriculum control but the establishment of high minimum qualifications for the teaching staff. The uniform curriculum works badly because it does not permit of relating teaching to the needs of the particular Indian children being taught. It requires the same work for Indian children who are the first generation to attend school and who do not speak English as it does for those who are of the third generation of school children, who have long been in contact with the whites, and speak English in the home.

The discipline in the boarding schools is restrictive rather than developmental. Routine institutionalism is almost the invariable characteristic of the Indian boarding school.

Although the problem of the returned Indian student has been much discussed, and it is recognized that in many instances the child returns to his home poorly adjusted to conditions that confront him, the Indian Service has lacked the funds to attempt to aid the children when they leave school either to find employment away from the reservation or to return to their homes and work out their salvation there. Having done almost no work of this kind, it has not subjected its schools to the test of having to show how far they have actually fitted the Indian children for life. Such a test would undoubtedly have resulted in a radical revision of the industrial training offered in the schools. Several of the industries taught may be called vanishing trades and others are taught in such a way that the Indian students cannot apply what they have learned in their own home and they are not far enough advanced to follow their trade in a white community in competition with white workers without a period of apprenticeship. No adequate arrangements have been made to secure for them the opportunity of apprenticeship.

*Economic Education and Development on the Reservations*. At a few reservations energetic and resourceful superintendents with a real faculty for leadership have demonstrated that the economic education of the Indian is entirely possible. These superintendents have been handicapped in part by their own lack of training in several of the fields which are involved in a well-rounded, effective program of economic and social education, but even more by the general absence of trained and experienced assistants in these different fields.

Even under the best conditions, it is doubtful whether a well-rounded program of economic advancement framed with due consideration of the natural resources of the reservation has anywhere been thoroughly tried out. The Indians often say that programs change with superintendents. Under the poorest administration there is little evidence of anything which could be termed an economic program.

Everywhere the lack of trained subordinate personnel in immediate contact with the Indians is striking. For years the Indian Service has had field positions with the title "Farmer." The duties of this position would more properly be described by the title "Field Clerk," or in some instances " General Laborer." The duties have rarely been those of an agricultural teacher and demonstrator, and the qualifications required have not been such as are necessary for teachers or leaders in agriculture. The salaries have been so low that, as a rule, the Service is fortunate if it gets a really good agricultural laborer with sufficient education to perform his clerical duties. Some exceptions must be noted. One or two well-trained agricultural teachers employed as farmers have shown what is possible, but in general the economic and industrial education of adult reservation Indians has been neglected.

Even less has been done toward finding profitable employment for Indians. As has been said, the schools do little for their graduates. Little is done on the reservations. In a few jurisdictions labor services are maintained chiefly in recruiting Indians for temporary unskilled labor. This employment service is largely mass work, not individualized, and it does not often seek to find the Indian an opportunity for a permanent position that offers him a chance to work up or one that will arouse his interest.

*Family and Community Development.* The Indian Service has not appreciated the fundamental importance of family life and community activities in the social and economic development of a people. The tendency has been rather toward weakening Indian family life and community activities than toward strengthening them. The long continued policy of removing Indian children from the home and placing them for years in boarding school largely disintegrates the family and interferes with developing normal family life. The belief has apparently been that the shortest road to civilization is to take children away from their parents and insofar as possible to stamp out the old Indian life. The Indian community activities particularly have often been opposed if not suppressed. The fact has been appreciated that both the family life and the community activities have many objectionable features, but the action taken has often been the radical one of attempting to destroy rather than the educational process of gradual modification and development.

The Service is notably weak in personnel trained and experienced in educational work with families and communities. The result is the almost total absence of well developed programs for the several jurisdictions specially adapted to meet local conditions. For many years the Indian Service has had positions for "Field Matrons" employed especially to work with families, but the salaries and the entrance qualifications have been so low that the competent field matron able to plan and apply a reasonably good constructive program is the rare exception. Superintendents are also, as a rule, weak in this branch of their work, and the central office is not adequately equipped to direct and supervise these highly important activities. At present the plan is to replace field matrons with public health nurses as rapidly as possible. This action will be an improvement because the vast majority of field matrons are untrained for their work, but families and communities stand in need of services in their economic and social development that lie outside of the field of training and effort of public health nurses, much as public health nurses are needed.

Some missionaries, a very few, have appreciated the necessity for developmental work with families and the promotion of wholesome community life. Most of the best missionary activities have been directed toward the education of children. The work for adults has consisted mainly of what may be termed church activities, and the evidence seems to warrant the conclusion that such activities by themselves are not very effective in reaching and influencing the Indians.

Both the government and the missionaries have often failed to study, understand, and take a sympathetic attitude toward Indian ways, Indian ethics, and Indian religion. The exceptional government worker and the exceptional missionary have demonstrated what can be done by building on what is sound and good in the Indian's own life.